

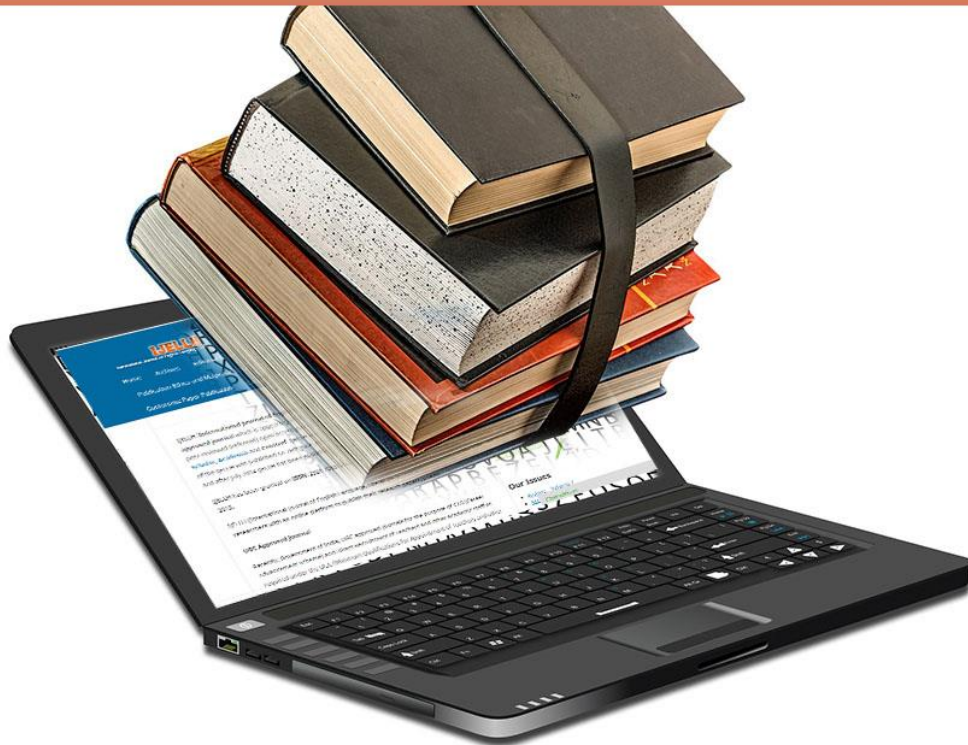
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Delineation of the Child's Mind in David Copperfield

David Copperfield is a novel by Charles Dickens, published in 1849-50. 'Of all my books,' wrote Dickens, 'I like this the best.' It has always been a favourite with a wide public, and has been filmed and adapted for television on numerous occasions. As per the Oxford Companion to English Literature the aforesaid novel is "the most autobiographical of Dickens's novels, it was the first to be written as a first-person narrative, showing how the young David learns to govern the first mistaken impulse of the undisciplined heart." (275). It is a strenuous task for any novelist to deal successfully with the life of a child as the centre of his art. Only a polymath is capable of delineating the child's mind and make a success of it. The novelist has got to be as simple as a child in his temperament to understand the psyche and pneuma of a child and yet have the skill of an artist. It is Dickens alone who could draw his children's characters sympathetically and convincingly. Childhood is the most crucial stage in everyone's life because this is the time when all the little things around us including the family members, neighbours, societal layout, social relations and other circumstances make so much impact in our mind and consequently this effect leads us into different stages of our life. Dickens childhood was not that easy as it is supposed to be, he left school to work in a factory when his father was imprisoned and incarcerated in debtor's prison. He faces the brutality of life while working in a factory in a very early age of his life and that is why he

got so much success in showing how the society works around and affect the child's life. Dickens could not easily forget his own experiences as child. The delectation, sorrows and joys of his childhood were always fresh and newfangled in his memory. Thus he was able to present them with the curiosity or zeal of a young child. Moreover, his imagination worked upon his intense, child-like vision of the world to produce something which was rich and unique in the field of literature. His insight in to the mind of a child is really stupendous, wondrous, eye-catching and amazeballs. He makes children highly individual. *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* are autobiographical in the line of narration. The heroes of the aforesaid novels narrate their bitter and tormenting experiences of childhood which was full of severe physical or mental suffering. Both of them have been terrified, unwanted and helpless in their childhood. In George Orwell's opinion no English writer has written better about child life than Dickens.

No other writer in the literary field got so much success in portraying a child's mind through his writing. Dickens get this power of delineation of the child's mind because he, himself has gone through the topsy-turvy and higgledy-piggledy experiences mingled with severe bitterness during his childhood. If we see the writings of Dickens with critical lens, we can easily understand that he was a very sensitive child; and this sensitive child becomes a sensitive man and that sensitive man can see and interpret the different layers of life but Dickens's main concern was to discuss the agony and trauma of childhood. Since Dickens had started handling the difficulties of life in the early age of his life so on the basis of the actual experiences of his life; he depicts his characters with the slice of reality.

From chapter first to fifteen of the book we are told about the childhood of David. They vividly portray the childhood scenes. The happy moments of David's childhood are very crucial when he stays with his mother and nurse Miss Peggotty. Also, worth remembering is his visit to Yarmouth on the sea coast, with Miss. Peggotty. David

recalls: "We used to walk about that dim old flat at Yarmouth in a loving manner, hours and hours. The days sported by us, as if Time had not grown up himself yet, but were a child too, and always at play." (49)

David don't get enough time to cherish these happy movements because when he was seven years old his mother married Edward Murdstone. David's equation with Murdstone was not good Murdstone and his sister Jane don't miss a single opportunity to thrash David. It is not easy for a posthumous child to lead his life when his step father giving him mental and physical tortures. David has a horrible image of Murdstones. Regarding his step father Murdstone, David is of the view that Murdstone is an intrusive father who snatched away his carefree life and is responsible for breaking the bond of love between him and his mother- "He patted on the head; but somehow, I didn't like him or his deep voice, and I was jealous that his hand should touch my mother's in touching me-which it did. I put it away, as well as I could." (30)

As a matter of fact David did not like Murdstone for two reasons, first is that he was not a lovable fellow, but the main reason is that he did not want to allow him to come near to his mother. We can only imagine the state of mind of a child who cannot meet his mother just because his step father did not want this or did not allow him to do so. In an atmosphere of cruel treatment David become sullen, dull and alien. He was beaten up daily, but after the six months of beast like treatment one day he came fully prepared for the lessons but as soon as he faced Murdstone, he forget everything. As a result he was beaten up again and he cried and saying that:

'Mr. Murdstone! Sir! I cried to him. 'Don't! Pray don't beat me! I have tried to learn, sir, but I can't learn while you and Miss Murdstone are by. I can't indeed!'. . .He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death. . .Then he was gone; and the

door was locked outside; and I was lying, fevered and hot, and torn, and sore, and raging in my puny way, upon the floor. (68)

Walter Allen rightly remarks about the delineation of childhood in *David Copperfield* in the following manner: "A boy would remember every brutal syllable in every brutal sentence. He would remember it to his dying day. In nothing is Dickens more palpably true than in the exactness with which he reproduces the intense sensitivity of childhood." Dickens describes children not from the point of view of an adult but from the point of view of a child. He becomes a child once more. He cannot easily forget the experiences of his childhood. He delineates his childhood experiences in his novel with the zeal, curiosity and energy of a child. With the help of his imaginative faculty he transforms his intense childlike vision of the world into something rich, strange and unique.

Finally the conditions became unbearable for David and he decided to run away. The last ray of hope for David was his only relative, his great aunt Betsey Trotwood. After this strong decision David packed his box and started his journey. But in the very beginning of his journey he was deprived of his money and lost his belongings. At last he decided to complete his journey on foot. Dickens gives an eyewitness description of the mental agony and depicts the aftermath of physical torture of David in the following way: "I thought my mother was sorry to see me standing in the room so scared and strange, and that, presently, when I stole to a chair, she followed me with her eyes more sorrowfully still-missing, perhaps, some freedom in my childish tread-but the word was not spoken, and the time for it was gone." (57).

If something can be revealed by means of a few bright rays, he makes use of glaring torches or as many bulbs as possible. If there is something to be darkened or subdued with dimmer lights or even shadows he never hesitates to keep pitch darkness in unbelievably

larger proportions. But one thing is definite. All along it never ceases to be seen through the eyes of a child.

The misery of David did not come to an end after keeping him imprisoned for five days, Murdstones decided to send David to a boarding school, called Salem House. The owner of the school was Mr. Creakle who was a heartless and unsympathetic man. Moreover, he was told by Murdstones that David was a naughty boy who could bite anyone's finger. It was a great shock for the child who was declared as culprit and all the limits were crossed when a notice "take care of him he bites" was tied to his back. All the other boys used to laugh and jeer at him in the school. Dickens gives all the minor details of the brutality of Mr. Creakle. We are told that all the boys in the school were ill-treated and they have a giant like image of their headmaster. In the novel David remembers Mr. Creakle that he was :

"The most ignorant man I have ever had the pleasure to know; who was one of the worst-tempered men perhaps that ever lived whose business it was to make as much out of us and to put as little into us possible."

One day David got a sad news of the death of his mother. It was the first time when David felt everything as an orphan into the wide world. It was the first time when David felt himself totally dejected and isolated. As soon as the procedure of funeral is over. Mr. Murdstone gave a clear cut idea to David that he was old enough to earn his living and now he was not able to give him any further education due to poverty. He said: "You will earn enough for yourself to provide for your eating and drinking, and pocket money." (163)

Then David started the job of washing bottles in the firm of Murdstone and Grinsby. David noticed that many empty bottles were lying there and a number of men and boys were employed to wash them. If the bottle ran short then thing had to stick the labels on the full ones, or corks, seals and pack in casks. He pastes labels on wine bottles. The agony of David was acute and following passage will reveal his inner torment:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth everyday associates with those of my happier childhood. . . my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. . . would pass away from me little by little, never to be brought back any more. . . I mingled my tears with the water in which I was washing the bottles; and sobbed as if there were a flaw in my own breast, and it were in danger of bursting. (166)

As soon as the mother of David is dead, the little child is left alone. His experiences with his father only add to his miseries. His childhood is worsened with the arrival of the Murdstones. The Murdstones leave no stone unturned to inflict pain and suffering on the little child he is rebuked and insulted every now and then. David is quite literally treated as dog:

'David', he said, making his lips thin, by pressing them together, 'if I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do?

'I don't know.'

'I beat him.'

What is that upon your face?

'Dirt,' I said.

He knew it was the mark of tears as well as. But if he had asked the question twenty times, each time with twenty blows, I believe my baby heart would have burst before I would have told him so. (57)

The cruelty at the workhouse and bitter reality of the factory laws were exposed when David goes to workhouse at the age of ten. He works there from dawn to dusk in the detrimental, deleterious, noxious, nauseating and suffocating environment and is paid only six or seven shillings per week. In this way he was not only suffered but at the same time he is victimised with the cruel and murderous hands of industrialization but still thousands of Davids were born and died unknown to the world. In a nutshell it can be said that Dickens

had a true sympathy for children. He himself had suffered the horrors in London when he was just a child of ten years age. The wounds his sensitive and delicate soul then received never fully healed and he carried the scar in his mind for the rest of his life. This early exposure to suffering made him very sensitive towards the feelings and sensibilities of children. The experiences and escapades advanced in Dickens-a perfervid sympathy for the poor and parentless children who were condemned to suffer in a hostile world. Thus he was able to create such immortal studies of childhood like those of Paul, David and Pip. David Copperfield, the blue-eyed boy amongst Dickens's fictional offspring, is the novel that most strikingly and prominently dramatises the issue of how far childhood may be regarded as a virtue or a glitch. It is also the first novel to trace in astounding psychological and subliminal detail the development of the child into an adult.

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